



“From the GM’s Desk”

18th June 2020



HERITAGE ADVICE

Council’s Heritage Advisor, Kate Higgins, will be visiting Bourke on Tuesday, 23 June 2020. Kate will be available to meet with anyone to discuss heritage matters they may have. This is a free service and is available for property owners and/or interested people who are seeking information or advice in relation to heritage buildings, renovations/restorations, tourism opportunities etc.

Council is again calling for applications for grant funding under the Local Heritage Fund. These small grants are offered in conjunction with the NSW Government on a \$ for \$ basis to private homeowners for restoration and repair work. Application forms can be downloaded from Council’s website and are also available at Council’s Office and the Bourke Public Library. Application forms can be emailed and/or posted to potential applicants, if required. Applications close at 4.00pm on Friday, 17 July 2020.

Please contact Council’s Environmental Services Department on 6830 8000 for any further information on heritage matters, including the Local Heritage Fund, or to make an appointment to speak with Council’s Heritage Advisor.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Local businesses have been coping reasonably well with the downturn caused by COVID-19 and some have benefitted from the job keeper payments which have also resulted in an income boost to local retail stores.

The last two (2) weeks have seen the re-opening of seven (7) of the eight (8) businesses that had to close due to the Pandemic, in accord with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. These re-openings have been of great benefit not only to the owners and employees of those businesses, but the community more generally.

I would encourage residents to support those businesses who had to close for either an extended period, or work on a restricted basis, to ensure that the retail sector of Bourke is able to not only survive but thrive.

SHADE SAILS

Works have been completed on the installation of shade sails over the playground equipment in Jones Park and the exercise equipment in Central Park. The funding for these shade sails was sourced from the ‘Everyone Can Play Grant Program’. This Program followed a commitment from the NSW Government to support Councils in creating both new and upgrading existing play spaces across NSW to ensure people of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds had the opportunity to play.

BOURKE ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT PROSPERITY STRATEGY (BAEPS)

Bourke Shire Council partnered with Maranguka to establish the Bourke Aboriginal Prosperity Strategy (BEAPS) some two (2) years ago and BAEPS had four (4) major objectives:-

- To ensure that an active local jobs board is maintained.
- To ensure that an active State Government Services, local contact board is maintained and access to State Government contacts is more readily available.
- To provide better local liaison between unemployed youth and employers.

- To provide a central register of all Government and Non-Government programs operating in the Bourke region.

For the best part, these objectives have been largely achieved despite the adverse economic conditions faced by Bourke as a result of the drought and the temporary closure of the abattoir which was seen as a major employment opportunity source.

The economy of Bourke received a significant boost due to the widespread rain and a good water flow in the river when the COVID-19 Pandemic commenced putting a significant dent in the economy locally and causing some businesses to close and others to scale back.

However, over the past few weeks, Senior Project Officer with BEAPS, Michael McDowell, has seen a turnaround in jobs advertised now that COVID-19 restrictions have eased and the ability to train new staff for local businesses and agencies can take place and hopefully will result in further job opportunities being developed

There are currently twelve jobs on the Bourke Jobs Board. The Jobs Board can be readily accessed by searching the internet for: Bourke Jobs Board.

Unfortunately, the proposed 2020 Employment EXPO for high school students across the region may not eventuate due to COVID-19. The ability to hold the event is dependent on the COVID-19 restrictions and how they will be applied to the school environment.

Michael is working on a Plan B at this stage with staff at Bourke High School which may take the form of a seminar in term four (4) to enhance application and resume preparation along with presentations on interview skills for those students looking to join the workforce.

It is important that persons seeking employment are able to compile good applications to ensure they are able to get shortlisted for an interview. At the same time, applicants then need to be able to enter the interview process with confidence and have an expectation of what questions may be posed during the interview and how they would respond to those questions.

REPAIR WORK ON CROSSLEY ENGINE

Council is pleased that local mechanic Brodie Parry will be working alongside Don Burns in undertaking the repairs to the Crossley Engine, located adjacent to the Bourke Wharf in Sturt St, Bourke. Brodie has recently finished his apprenticeship with Bourke Shire Council and has demonstrated a strong interest in the Crossley. It will be good to have someone locally based who can effect repairs as they are required.

TOURIST ACTIVITY

In the short period that the Back O' Bourke Information & Exhibition Centre has been reopened since the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, visitors have started to arrive from along the east coast of NSW and/or the Melbourne region in Victoria.

Predominately travelling with caravans, the visitors are keen on visiting the Back O' Bourke Centre, Mount Oxley and traversing the Darling River exploring its unique camping spots and the communities along this developing tourist trail.

If the June long weekend is a gauge to go by and coupled with the reopening of the NSW/Queensland, then the upcoming July school holidays should also see strong visitor numbers.

Staff at the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre anticipate the balance of what will be a very shortened season (pending COVID-19) to be very busy. Visitor enquiries have doubled on this time last year and the restrictions of travel have resulted in tourists looking at local destinations much more closely.

NEW TOURISM CONCEPT

The introduction of tourism flights over the Bourke area have been started by Steve and Jenny Greentree. These flights add another dimension to the tourist activities available in Bourke. Steve and Jenny are to be congratulated for "looking outside the square" in developing this new venture.

With an anticipated increase in domestic visitation across the Nation, due to the ongoing overseas travel restrictions, it is important that Bourke is able to provide a wide range of activities to cater as best it can for the diverse interests of visitors.

RATES PAYMENTS ABLE TO BE DEFERRED (COVID-19 RATES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY)

As part of the COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives, Council is offering rate relief for community members and businesses suffering financial hardship. Council adopted its Rates and Financial Assistance Policy at its May 2020 Ordinary Meeting of Council.

The Policy allows eligible Ratepayers to defer the next three (3) quarterly rate instalments and request a payment plan. In addition, Council has suspended interest charges to eligible ratepayers for the period approved in the application to ease the burden on businesses and community members. Council is keen to ensure that residents are aware that Council is there to support them through these difficult circumstances. Application forms are available on the Council webpage: www.bourke.nsw.gov.au or by contacting the office on 02 68308000 and speaking to Councils Revenue Officer.

ROADS UPDATE

Work has been undertaken on Rural Local Road (RLR) 4, Bundy Road, utilising funding from Councils Roads to Recovery Funding with the work focusing on the gravelling of the sand hills, which have been a problem for many motorists.

All State highways slashing crew of the high grass is currently underway with the grass height exceeding the safety level governed by Transport for NSW. This has come on in result of all of the rain events that we have enjoyed over the last few months.

On the Bourke to Cobar Road (Kidman Way) motorists will notice there are several worksites set up with signage.

These sites mark the beginning of the Heavy Patching program that will continue for a few weeks. Short delays in your travel time are expected as the crew makes its way towards the Cobar Boundary. Please be patient and adhere to speed zones as we are making the road surface better for all.

SHOWGROUND GRANTS

Council has submitted further applications for funding under the State Government's Stimulus Package which provides for funding for works on showgrounds across the State. A total of some \$13 million was allocated under Phase 1 of the package with the remaining \$12 million, from a total package of \$25 million, to be allocated under Phase 2.

Council's first priority in the applications lodged in respect of Phase 2 is the construction of a large shade structure which can be utilised for protection from the elements when there are functions held at the JB Renshaw Sporting Complex. Again, the need for such a structure was identified following consultation with user groups.

Being a multi-purpose facility, it is important that any improvements are consistent with the requirements of the various user groups to maximise the benefits from the expenditure.

All the recent improvements and applications for funding made in respect of the the JB Renshaw Sporting Complex have been undertaken with the aim to ensure the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the facility, and importantly, to further increase utilisation of the multipurpose facility.

As I have previously indicated, Bourke Shire is fortunate to have very good facilities in relation to sport and recreation. Councils focus has been to update and modernise the facilities it has rather than build additional facilities, which not only involves significant capital costs, but also includes the costs of ongoing maintenance.

WATER RESTRICTIONS

As of 1.00pm Sunday, 14 June 2020, the river level was at 4.03 metres (m), with water ceasing to flow over the weir at around 3.98 m. Once the water stops flowing over the weir, Level One (1) Water Restriction will be introduced.

Level 1 Restrictions mean that watering is restricted to two (2) hours per day, either between 6.00am and 8.00am or 6.00pm and 8.00pm.

The level had dropped to 4.02m but the inflow from the rain on Saturday night saw a slight increase in the height to 4.04m before dropping back to 4.03m

The river has dropped from 4.15 metres on Monday, 1 June 2020 to the level of 4.02m prior to the rain late on 13 June which is a drop of 1 centimetre per day which is consistent with established usage patterns.

At this stage there are no substantive flows upstream and only further local rain will prevent the introduction of restrictions.

Whilst there are a number of factors which can influence the river level, it is anticipated that restrictions will be in place later in the week unless we get a substantive rain event.

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

The next Council meeting of Bourke Shire Council will be held on 22 June 2020 and is again likely to be held at the Back O' Bourke Convention Centre, depending on what changes are made to the COVID-19 Public Health Orders.

The meeting will commence at 9.15am and will again be live streamed with the link for the livestream being advised on Councils Website at approximately 9.00am on the meeting day.

There is no public forum planned to be held at this stage, however, if any resident would like to raise any issue in relation to the items on the agenda they are invited to do so by forwarding the matter they wish to raise to Council via email: bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au or via telephone 68308000, ensuring that these are done by 8.30am on meeting day.

2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

The NSW Government has announced that the Local Government Elections will be held on Saturday, 4 September 2021.

It follows the decision to postpone the September 2020 Council Elections for 12 months because of the COVID-19 Pandemic to ensure the health and safety of candidates, voters and NSW Electoral Commission staff.

The NSW Electoral Commissioner made the request to postpone the elections.

Minister for Local Government, the Hon Shelley Hancock, has advised that current Councillors will continue to hold their civic offices until the rescheduled local government elections are held on 4 September 2021.

The decision to postpone elections was not taken lightly and was made to provide certainty for Councils and communities across the State.

The State Government has previously indicated that the election cycle will not change meaning that the elections following those in 2021 will be held in 2024 meaning that those Councillors currently in office will serve for a five-year term and those Councillors elected in 2021 will serve for a three-year term.

WEBINAR HOSTED BY OFFICE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mayors, Councillors and General Managers from across the State took advantage of the opportunity to participate in a webinar with Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Minister for Local Government Shelley Hancock last week.

The webinar was part of a series of Council webinars co-ordinated by Minister Hancock with relevant Ministers and public officials across Government to keep Mayors and General Managers up to date on the latest COVID-19 information and advice, and answer their questions.

A range of issues were discussed during the webinar including:-

- COVID-19 funding support for Councils;
- Public Health Orders;
- Local government representation on National Cabinet;
- Postponement of Council elections;
- Bushfire-related support;
- Joint Organisation funding; and,
- Election costs.

Council has previously acknowledged the excellent level of communication that has been provided by the Office of Local Government in relation to COVID-19 and its impact on Councils across the State.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Continuous effort—not strength or intelligence—is the key to unlocking our potential.”

Winston Churchill

Ross Earl
General Manager